

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS
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Nice day. This is great. A year ago April I was in California in Coronado and I got a call from the president's office at Ohio State saying, "Would I be interested in coming to deliver the commencement address in Ohio Stadium." Now for a kid who grew up in central Ohio, if the question is "Would you like to speak in Ohio Stadium?" yeh, I think so. I'm told I'm going to be given an honorary doctorate today which I'm very proud of. I wonder if they would throw in an honorary Heisman Trophy?

This may be the most important place in my lifetime. I don't think the White House or Buckingham Palace has any more grandeur to me than Ohio Stadium. I remember the first time I walked in here with my parents when I was eight or nine years old, coming up those steps from the gray hallways underneath and seeing the size and the colors, all the people reaching up to the sky, it just seemed there was nothing bigger, nothing grander than what goes on here. Ohio Stadium seemed to symbolize all the possibilities that life could offer. And to me it still does.

All of us who live here, all of us who went to school here, grew up here, know something about Ohio. We know that it's not considered by the taste makers to be as sophisticated as New York, nor as glamorous as Hollywood, not as elegant as London or Paris. And yet we know something else. We know there's something here that almost can't be defined. I think of it in little things.

When Adolph Hitler was attempting to take over the world based on the concept of the master race and was convincing people around the world that he might be right, because of his power, the Olympics were held in Berlin. And one person in front of the entire world showed Hitler that he was wrong. And it could have been anybody. It could have been from anywhere. But it was Jesse Owens of The Ohio State University.

When we were originally in the race to space with the Soviet Union - it is hard to explain now how frightening that was - it looked like the future of mankind might depend on it. And we were trying to catch up and we finally got someone to orbit the earth. It could have been anyone. It could have been from anywhere. But I don't think any of us who sat in the classrooms that day watching the televisions that had been brought in for that one day, will ever forget the words, "God speed, John Glenn." John Glenn of New Concord, Ohio.

It could have been from anywhere. But he wasn't. He was from right here. First man on the moon in the history of mankind, in our lifetime, it happened. Someone went from the earth to the moon. Again, it could have been anyone. It could have been from anywhere. But Neil Armstrong was from Wapakoneta who grew up breathing Ohio air.

The smaller things, also. You know, the game of golf. It's supposed to be an east coast elitist sport with all the fancy, famous old clubs on the east coast. But the greatest golfer who ever lived practiced by himself away from those glamour center here in central Ohio. Jack Nicklaus, Columbus, The Ohio State University.

When polio was terrifying the world and parents were praying that their children could be saved, scientists all over the world were trying to figure out a way to save them. The vaccine that is still being used today again could have been developed anywhere. Dr. Albert Sabin of Cincinnati, Ohio.

And today, I mean for all these years, scientists, great thinkers have been working to try to finally to do the impossible, to find a cure for cancer. No one has ever done it. Maybe we are just a little bit closer now. But if you reading the newspapers lately, you'll realize the person who perhaps will be the one to cure cancer and wipe it out in our lifetime, could have been from anywhere, could be anybody. Dr. Judah Folkman, Bexley High School and The Ohio State University.

I'd like to take credit for thinking up those links, the connection between Ohio and the people who come out of Ohio, but it's not mine. It was told to me by one of the most remarkable men I have ever known. And that was Woody Hayes. He was telling me why this place, this Ohio, is so special. And he used some of those examples. You know, the stereotype of Woody, you know, on this football field, throwing the yard markers, screaming. Around the country they tried to picture Woody as some angry, bullying Neanderthal. Woody would kid himself and say they think I'm a big, dumb old football coach. But if that were true, why did every player who ever played for him love him so much.

The last time I had dinner with Woody before he died was at the old Jai Alai restaurant. And we were sitting in that back booth he always used and he said something to me which occurred to me as maybe the message I ought to give you today. Woody said, "You can never really pay back but you ought to pay forward." I didn't know what that meant. And then I started hearing stories after Woody died. I heard a story from the brother-in-law of a Vietnam soldier. The soldier had been seriously wounded and, in fact, he would later die in the war. And he was from Columbus. And one day the soldier was in the hospital in Vietnam and there was a knock on the door of his mother's house. She opened the door and a portly, gray haired man in a business suit stood there and said, "My name is Woody Hayes." Now Woody in 1968 when this happened may have been the most famous man in Ohio. May have been? He was. He was the most famous man in Ohio. But there were still some people who hadn't quite placed the name. So this woman has Woody Hayes standing there, and she invites him in but she asks him, "I know your name. What exactly do you do?" And Woody said, "I'm a football coach up at the university." And he sat down. He had visited with this woman's son in Vietnam and he had come back. He had taken pictures of the boy and he had promised he would come to say the boy was all right. And he sat with the woman.

And it turned out he would do this all the time. No one ever knew about it. Woody would go on a State Department trip and he would come back and visit the parents. He had student volunteers drive him all over Ohio. No one ever knew it, but he did it.

You can always pay forward.

A nurse at University Hospital told me that after Woody had died she told me a story that an Ohio State football player had been in University Hospital and Woody had come to to visit him. And on the same floor was a young boy who was very, very seriously ill and it didn't look like he was going to live. And Woody visited with him also. The football player soon enough was released from the hospital. And the nurse said she kept coming back. And she noticed every night that Woody Hayes would be sitting with that boy he had visited, the boy who was so sick. And no one ever knew about it. But she said every night there's this child and here's Woody Hayes. And when the child died, he had an Ohio State poster and an autographed football. And why did he do it? Because he was Woody.

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Vic Janowicz, who won the Heisman Trophy in this stadium, came upon some very bad times. He was living in Chicago. He was having physical and personal problems. Woody and the Ohio State team flew in. Now a lot of people would see the poignancy of that, from the Heisman Trophy to great trouble. Woody did more. He went to the house where Vic was living and he told him, "You need to be in University Hospital. We're not going back to Columbus without you." And, after the game that night, Woody went to get him and on the airplane, on the charter, there was the Ohio State football team and there was Vic Janowicz, very quiet, not knowing what lay ahead. He came back here and he got better and he became a well liked and respected member of the community. And when Vic died one of the pallbearers was Archie Griffin. The two men had two things in common - the Heisman Trophy and Woody Hayes.

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And as I stand in this stadium (actually I thought last year as the hurricane hit) I imagine Woody standing over at the sidelines yelling at all of us as we left, "What are you doing? A couple of raindrops never hurt anybody. What are you afraid of?"

I asked Anne Hayes, Woody's widow, to come last year. She couldn't make it because of her own health. But I wanted her to come here because this, I hope, would be some of the things Woody would say to you in this stadium. This is his speech.

Along with that I have one more message which is one of the wisest and best people I've ever known once told me that the good things in life should be thought of like pebbles in a jar. And that there's no perfect way to remove the pebbles. If you take them out too fast, you're being greedy and they'll be gone. If you're too slow, you're hoarding them and you'll never have the good time. So the secret of the good life is to savor every moment, to savor every pebble in that jar and treasure them each.

I think some of you know what's coming up now,. My parents have been coming to this stadium for more than fifty years. Every Saturday, they were here. They were they ones who brought me the first time. And their whole life has been marked by Saturdays in this stadium. They're here today. They've had to stop coming to the games. My dad's not getting around to well anymore. And they don't come anymore. But I was going to do this last year. And I can't do without asking for your help. A son really only gets one chance in a lifetime to do something like this. So if you could be kind enough, I would love in Ohio Stadium a standing ovation for my mom and dad. Thank you. Mom, you can sit down now. Quit crying.

Thank you very much. We do know in our hearts that we are probably not as sophisticated as New York here. We know we are not as glamorous as Hollywood or as elegant as London or Paris. We're not any of those things. But those of us who grew up here in the middle of Ohio where I did or who are graduating as you are, know one thing about this place. It's the best place. It's the best place in the world. And you're here and you've gone to school in the best place there is. I'm very proud to be with you here today.

Thank you very much.